



Explore HOW Priestley creates Tension in An Inspector Calls



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)



Secrets of the family revealed

- Erics affair
- The pregnancy
- Gerald's affair
- Sybil's hypocrisy
- Erics dishonesty and immorality
- Grandchild of the Birlings
- Mr Birling's immorality
- Dismissing of Eva from Milwards

Stage Directions and Setting

Act 1 - Priestley uses **stage directions to set the scene and give us information about the Birling family** before we even see them.

The setting suggests that the **Birlings are a comfortable and well – off** middle to upper class family. We can also tell that they are **all feeling relaxed and confident** at the beginning of the play:

- ☐ *set - large suburban house*
- ☐ *furniture - ‘solid ...but not cosy and homelike’*
- ☐ *props – suggests wealth ‘champagne glasses’, ‘decanter of port’*
- ☐ *costume ‘evening dress of the period’ white tie and tails – a formal occasion*
- ☐ *lighting – ‘pink and intimate’*



At the start of the play the Birling's are seated and relaxed. By the end all standing and shouting and crying.

Structure

Unity of Place, Time and Action

Very Compact and tight structure – follows the three unities of **place, action and time are kept to in a realistic manner**. i – 1 day, 1 location, 1 clear and distinct plot – no diversion from the seriousness of the problem

Follows the rules of **Greek Drama**- the three unities of **place, action and time are kept to in a realistic manner**. i.e. The Drama all unfolds in one place- Birling's Dining room. Action all takes place in one evening, time passes in the same way as in real life. This makes the play realistic.

Staging

All the action in 1 room – claustrophobic and intense. Suggests that the Birling's live in a closed, protected world, sheltered from reality. The Inspector and social responsibility is not welcome.

The inspector is a dramatic device

- The Inspector **'inspects' or interrogates** each person in turn. He shows a **photo of Eva Smith** to each character in turn that only they see. The **audience is intrigued** and wants to know what this is.
- The inspector **'creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'**. He also speaks **'carefully, weightily'** and **'has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking'**. This interests an audience – **we want to know why he is there and how people will react** to his questioning.
- Inspector leaves the room, having introduced Eva Smith's change of name to Daisy Renton. **Audience want to know why this has occurred – suspense and intrigue builds up.**
- **Interrogation of Birling.** Birling feels uncomfortable and tries to threaten Goole with his friendship with Colonel Roberts- **Goole is not afraid of the power and status that Mr Birling has.**



Clear and direct line
of interrogation -
heightens the tension

Eva's Absence from Stage



- Through her absence, Eva has a powerful presence .
- She was involved with every one of the Birlings
- Her innocence her revealed even though she is absent
- She exposes their immorality and culpability



Timing

Timing of entrances and exits creates tension and suspense in the play

- The Inspector arrives immediately after Birling has told Gerald about his impending knighthood and about how "a man has to look after himself and his own."
- **Sheila runs off stage** when she realises she is the reason Eva was sacked - **creates intense atmosphere.**
- **Sheila and Gerald are left alone to discuss Daisy Renton**- this draws information out for audience.
- Tension is further created by the way **information is gradually revealed**, one person at a time. The audience and characters are kept on their toes.



Cliff Hangers

- **Act 1:** The inspector returns at the end of the scene and asks his question '*Well?*' This is a **cliff-hanger** – **audience want to watch on to see how Gerald and Sheila react.**
- **Act 2:** The **front door slams, announcing Eric's return**, but the audience have to wait until Act 2 for his confession.
- **(The front door bangs** every time someone enters or leaves the house. The characters and audience can hear this, and wonder who enters the house- **effective sound effect in creating tension**
- **Act 3:** Ends off with the **telephone ringing sharply** and disturbing the atmosphere that they have restored after the inspector leaves - builds up the tension